

Veneta Cooperative Farm Stand

Location of Project: Veneta, Oregon (Western Region)

Purpose: This project was started by four farmers and two restaurant owners who combined forces to develop a cooperative, organic farm stand, called the Jubilee Farm Stand, in Veneta, Oregon. The objectives of this project were to:

- Provide a direct market outlet for the very small growers who cannot afford the time to attend neighboring farmers markets;
- Provide an opportunity for local farmers who already travel to neighboring markets to develop a closer-to-home marketing base without a large time investment;
- Introduce organic products to the Veneta community and partner with a local restaurant that is doing the same;
- Create a venue for carrying out consumer education projects such as demonstrations by local master gardeners, preservers and composters; and
- Display information on local alternative agricultural ventures such as CSAs, organic farms, and alternative products.

Accomplishments: The project started in April and ended in December of 2000. The stand operated every Thursday evening, 3-7 p.m., in the parking lot of Our Daily Bread Restaurant, from June through September. The timing of the stand's operation was purposely designed to correspond with the restaurant's popular all-you-can eat spaghetti special. The stand itself consisted of an 8' by 10' wooden booth, two large display racks and two market umbrellas with tables. It was set up and taken down each week.

Jubilee Farm Stand proved to be a successful small step to building a viable local, organic market in a small town. Because the project was managed by a group of experienced farmers and restaurant owners working cooperatively, they were able to share a significant amount of expertise on merchandising, advertising, and direct marketing. The growers and restaurant owners pooled their financial resources for advertising, and shared responsibility for selling and merchandising products. In fact, the growers and owners were so impressed with what results were achieved that they agreed to increase their cooperation in planning their production and delivering/selling their merchandise in the future.

On any Thursday, an abundance of honey, vegetables, fruits, flowers, nursery plants, herbs, and eggs could be found at the farm stand.

As one participating grower noted, "we were a great advertisement

for local, organic produce”. Even though none of the growers made a substantial amount of money from the farm stand, they were able to introduce excellent quality local produce to the community and community members responded in their purchasing habits. Approximately 775 Veneta community members purchased food at the market between June and September out of a town population of approximately 3,500. The average customer count was 45 per evening, with the peak customer count reaching about 70.

Not only did the stand introduce locally-grown organic produce to household consumers in the community, it also supplied produce to the local restaurant partner, Our Daily Bread. This enabled the owners to meet a primary goal of participating in this project: the ability to purchase more locally grown organic vegetables.

The stand was well received by the community as well as the neighboring city of Eugene. One radio announcer on a local community college station in Eugene aired several unsolicited plugs for Jubilee Farm Stand. A local entertainment weekly also included the stand on their weekly calendar for several months.

Lessons Learned: Partnering with the restaurant was a mutual win-win situation. Not only did the farm stand allow the restaurant to provide more local

organic produce, it also attracted new customers to the restaurant, helping them build business in the face of new national-chain, fast-food establishments. The stand also benefited from the restaurant partnership by developing a steady flow of patrons who learned about the farm stand after visiting the restaurant next door. It enjoyed the additional advantages of having access to an excellent location complete with water, storage and electricity at no cost, and the credibility of being associated with a known business establishment.

Conclusion:

Overall, the Jubilee Farm Stand was quite successful in obtaining its objectives. A good number of customers attended the stand, over 700, and 13 local organic farmers participated to make a grand total of \$4,099.93 in gross sales. Although the stand did not attract as many customers as growers would have liked, the customers they did attract were very supportive of its operation. All the farmers who participated felt the stand was a worthwhile endeavor and were eager to do it again.